

Estimate of alcohol consumption per adult in 2018

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Introduction

This objective of this brief paper is to calculate the 2018 level of average per adult consumption of alcohol. The data used are from the CSO Population and Migration Estimates for April 2018 (published in August 2018) and the Revenue Commissioners' alcohol clearances data (the 2018 figures were made available in March 2019 and can be obtained from the Revenue website). The level and trend in average alcohol consumption are important elements in public policy evaluation and design.

Methodology

The measurement approach follows standard international practice and also the practice of previous Irish estimates by Foley undertaken for DIGI, such as (Foley 2018).

The aggregate alcohol content of the different beverages are based on 5% alcohol by volume for cider, 12.5% alcohol content for wine and the actual alcohol estimates provided in the clearances data by Revenue for spirits and beer. Some international and national estimates use lower alcohol contents for wine and cider. The international convention of defining the adult population as 15 years and over is used, although this is, of course, an inaccurate measure of the adult population. The population data refer to April of each year.

Consumption is equated with clearances as is normally done in estimates such as these, although clearances are not an exact measure of consumption due to factors such as unrecorded out-of-state sourcing, stock changes and the effects of outward and inward tourism. These and other limitations of the alcohol consumption measurement methodology are discussed in Foley (2015).

Average alcohol consumption per adult 2017 and 2018

The data are presented in Table 1. The aggregate alcohol clearances and the “adult” populations are presented. These two are combined to provide the average per adult consumption.

Table 1. Average per adult alcohol consumption 2017 and 2018

	2017	2018	% change 2017/2018
Litres of pure alcohol (LPA), total consumption	41,944,582	42,691,031	+1.8
Adult population (aged 15 and over), millions	3.7855	3.8482	+1.7
Litres of pure alcohol per adult (LPA)	11.080	11.094	+0.1
Beer (LPA)	18,811,364	19,310,783	+2.7
Cider (LPA)	3,201,089	3,214,983	+0.4
Spirits (LPA)	8,300,811	8,763,390	+5.6
Wine (LPA)	11,631,318	11,401,875	-2.0

Sources: CSO Population and Migration Estimates August 2018. Revenue Commissioners, Alcohol Clearances data, 2018. Website, 2019.

Total alcohol consumption as measured by clearances increased by +1.8% in 2018 compared with 2017. The number of adults (as defined by 15 years and over) increased by +1.7%. This resulted in a very small increase of +0.1% in average alcohol consumption per adult. It was 11.080 LPA in 2017 compared with 11.094 LPA in 2018.

Average per adult consumption is now slightly above 11 LPA. By comparison, it was at around 11 LPA in 1994 and peaked at 14.44 LPA in 2001. Since 2001 the average per adult alcohol consumption has declined by -23.2%.

In more recent years average alcohol consumption was 11.566 LPA in 2012, dropped below 11 LPA in each of 2013 to 2015, increased to 11.240 LPA in 2016, dropped slightly to 11.080 in 2017 and increased

very slightly to 11.094 in 2018. The 2018 average adult alcohol consumption is below the 2016 level.

Total spirits consumption volume increased by +5.6% between 2017 and 2018 which was the largest increase of the four beverages. Beer consumption volume increased by +2.7%. Cider volume increased by +0.4%. Wine volume decreased by -2.0%.

Summary

- Since its peak in 2001 the **average per adult alcohol consumption has declined by -23.2%**.
- **Total consumption increased by +1.8% in 2018** and there were was an increase in the adult population of +1.7%.
- **Average per adult alcohol consumption increased by a very small +0.1% in 2018** compared with 2017, from 11.080 LPA to 11.094 LPA.
- **Total spirits consumption volume increased by +5.6%** between 2017 and 2018 which was the **largest increase of the four beverages**.
 - Beer volume increased by +2.7%.
 - Cider volume increased by +0.4%.
 - Wine volume decreased by -2.0%.

References

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For additional information/clarification on the data and calculations please contact tony.foley@dcu.ie.